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ABSTRACT

A group of 240 men and women of various ages were given the opportunity to express altruistic behavior in an interpersonal situation by granting a favor of permitting the experimenters, one white woman and two white men in their mid-twenties to enter a store check-out line ahead of them during the Christmas rush. The researchers hypothesized that as people age and become more socialized they would be more apt to help. Alternatively, they believed that changing American values would cause younger people to be more tolerant of the request. It was hypothesized that relative age between experimenter and subject would be most significant in determining cooperation. However, results showed that older males were most cooperative in their altruistic behavior, followed by young males, young females, and older females. Perhaps women over 45 regard shopping as a job and become hardened to the routine. Alternatively, agreeable and polite men may view shopping as a diversion and may be less fearful of strangers. Additional research utilizing experimenters over 45 is needed to balance the findings of this study. Three tables are included. (APG)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPARENT AGE AND HELPING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

In this study, subjects were given the opportunity to demonstrate altruistic behavior in an interpersonal situation by granting a relatively small favor--permitting the experimenters to enter a check-out line, in a store, ahead of them when asked several weeks prior to Christmas. There is a possibility that as people grow older, and become more socialized, they would be more apt to help. On the other hand, because of changing values in American society, especially for youth, it is quite likely that younger people might be more tolerant of a small request. Subjects were 240 men and women of various ages. Experimenters were one woman and two men, all white, in their mid-twenties. It was hypothesized that relative age between the experimenter and the subject would be the most significant variable in determining cooperation--that the younger subject would be more tolerant of a small favor when asked by someone of the same approximate age. However, this was not the case. The results of this unobtrusive study clearly show that older males are most cooperative in their altruistic behavior, followed by young males, young females, and finally older females. Perhaps women, in general, and particularly those over 45, regard shopping as their "job"--as, more or less, a chore. Maybe they become hardened to the routine. As such, they are out to fend for themselves, and are only interested in leaving the store as quickly as possible. Alternatively, men were found to be more agreeable and polite. It could be that men do not feel as much a part of this setting as do women--with men viewing shopping as a diversion. Men may also be less fearful of strangers. Additional research should be done utilizing older experimenters, over 45, to balance the findings of this study.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPARENT AGE AND HELPING BEHAVIOR

In this study subjects were given the opportunity to demonstrate altruistic behavior in an interpersonal situation by granting a relatively small favor. There is a possibility that as people get older they become more socialized, and hence would more likely be apt to help. However, because of changing values in American society, especially of youth, it is quite likely that younger people would be more tolerant of a small request.

It has been demonstrated that people under thirty are much more willing to cooperate with experimenters when requested to judge the values of a "deviant" appearing youth on the basis of his photograph (Raymond, Unger, and Stone, 1972). Also, adults tend to be more cooperative toward those who resemble themselves in race, attire, or age (Raymond and Unger, 1972; Graf and Riddell, 1972). In addition, Ahammer and Baltes (1970) have shown that in some instances, differences in values between generations are perceived where, in fact, no such differences exist. This experiment does not attempt to propagate the existence of a supposed "generation gap" per se. Although since the experimenters here are categorized as belonging to the younger group, it is hypothesized that the younger subjects will be more cooperative toward them than the older group. Age is the factor of the most concern for this research.

Another factor of consideration was the sex of the subjects. Under laboratory conditions, females who asked for help received more help than females who did not request such aid and more help than dependent males (Gruder and Cook, 1971). In some situations requiring cooperation, e.g., petition signing (Keasey and Tomlinson-Keasey, 1971) and being in a stalled car (Deaux, 1971) females received less cooperation than males. Some studies indicate that females are more likely to be helped, relationship of sex to cooperation, than males (Berkowitz, Klanderman, and Harris, 1964; Gruder and Cook, 1971). Unger, Raymond, and Levine (1972) found that a female experimenter received more cooperation than a male experimenter in being permitted to enter a check-out line ahead of the person being asked (81.9% vs. 66.7%); and male subjects cooperated more than female subjects (78.5% vs. 68.8%). Female subjects cooperated equally with male and female experimenters. Male subjects cooperated more with the female experimenter than with the male experimenter (92% vs. 64%). The last study is important to this research because of the clever procedure adopted to test helping behavior.

Blacks receive significantly less assistance than do whites (Bryan and Test, 1967; Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin, 1969; Gaertner and Bickman, 1971). Therefore, in an effort to avoid confounding variables in this study race was not a factor. All experimenters and subjects were white.

When questionaires and interviews are used for studies there is the hope that the attitudes being measured will yield a good correlation to the real world. However, this is often not true. So in this study, as seems to be the trend in social psychology today, an unobtrusive measure was chosen as an alternative.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 240 subjects were used in this study. The total subject population was divided into two groups. One group consisted of those subjects who appeared to be 45 years of age or older, and those who appeared to be under 25 years of age. An equal number of males and females were sampled. Although race was not a factor, all of the subjects were white.

Procedure

There were two male and two female experimenters in this study. The two males and one female experimenter are graduate students at Montclair. The other female experimenter is an undergraduate sociology major. All of the experimenters are white and under the age of 27.

In order to demonstrate helping behavior a plan was used where the experimenter requested a small favor from each subject. Each experimenter approached a subject who was standing in a long check-out line with several items. The subject was then asked: "I am in a terrible rush and I only have one item to buy,

may I please go in front of you?" If the subject questioned allowed the experimenter to enter the line, that was scored as an affirmative or helping response. If the subject refused the request, it was scored as a negative or non-helping response. If the subject "helped" the experimenter, the experimenter waited in line for a short while and then left the line after making the excuse of forgetting an item. If there was a negative response, the experimenter left that line. Each experimenter questioned 60 subjects - 15 males and 15 females who appeared to be under 25 years of age, and 15 males and 15 females who appeared to be over 45 years of age.

RESULTS

The results of the study were calculated by using chi-square to test two factors for significance at the $p < .01$ level. The two factors were age and sex of subjects, but their relation to the sex of the experimenter was also considered (and not the age of the experimenter since they were all categorized as younger).

In regards to age, there were a total of 214 "helping" responses recorded and 26 "non-helping" responses. Breaking the results down into the two age groups (under 25 or over 45) the results are as follows. Of those under 25 years, 110 complied with the request and 10 did not. Of those over 45 years of age, 104 complied while 16 did not. When tested for significance at the $p < .01$ level, the results were significant.

Concerning the sex of subjects: of the 120 males tested, 114 complied while 6 did not; and of the 120 females tested 100 complied while 20 did not. These results were found to be significant at the p .01 level.

A further breakdown of the results according to percentages of subjects complying can be seen in Tables I, II, and III.

Table I consists of the percentage of subjects complying according to their age and sex. It can be seen in the table

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Insert Table I about here

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that the older appearing female subjects had the lowest percentage of compliance, while the older males had the highest percentage of compliance. Even though sex alone was found not to be significant, the combination of being female and 45 years or older appears to be important in responding to the experimenter.

Table II deals with the sex of the subjects complying in relation to the sex of experimenters. Table II shows that

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Insert Table II about here

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the highest percentage of compliance occurred when the experimenters were female and the subjects were male. The lowest percentage of compliance occurred when the experimenters were female and the subjects were female. The other two categories

appeared to be almost equal.

The final table takes the age of the subjects in relation to the sex of the experimenters into consideration. As the

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Insert Table III about here

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results of Table III show, the only important category is that of a young subject being tested by a male experimenter. In that category 93.3% of the subjects complied. The other three categories were equal.

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that relative age between the experimenter and the subject would be the most significant variable in determining cooperation - that the younger subject would be more tolerant of a small favor asked by someone approximately his own age. However, this was not the case. The results of this unobtrusive study clearly show that older males are most cooperative in their altruistic behavior, followed by young males, young females, and finally older females. The results of this study vary somewhat from the Raymond and Unger (1972) study where it was found that adults tend to be more cooperative toward those who resemble them in race, attire, or age. Can this be applied to younger people as well?

The other factor under consideration is the sex of the subjects. It was discovered that men were the most altruistic

in all cases. Many studies have looked at the correlation of the subject's sex and helping behavior. Piliavin et al (1969) report that men help significantly more than women in emergencies. In the experiment by Gaertner and Bickman (1971), which was a nonemergency helping situation, the same result was obtained. Further work by Bickman confirmed this finding, using the same basic technique, but utilizing victims of both sexes and a different population of subjects. This study's findings are reinforced by the results of Unger et al (1972) whereby male subjects cooperated more in giving permission to an experimenter to enter a check-out line ahead of themselves.

It may be interesting to discuss why this was the case in our given setting. Perhaps women, in general, and especially those over 45 regard shopping as their "job" - as more or less a chore. They become hardened to the routine and are out to fend for themselves. Nothing interests them more than getting in and out of the store as quickly as possible.

Men, on the other hand, were found to be more agreeable and polite. Perhaps this is partly because they do not feel as much a part of this setting as women do. To most, shopping is not as routine as it becomes to women.

Why were older men more obliging to the experimenters, especially the women? Perhaps these older men being of a different generation, have been placed in a pattern of chauvinism and double-standards by society. They have been taught

that they belong to the stronger, superior sex, always prepared to let the weaker member pass. Men under 25, because of the new stress placed on sexual equality do not feel the responsibility to be as helpful to a woman. And women, especially the older ones feel it is their place to be helped as opposed to helping someone else.

Table II shows the interesting fact that the female subjects helped the female experimenters the smallest percentage of all four categories. Perhaps this is due to a type of competition and distrust which seems to exist between women in our society.

Table III indicates that the subjects under 25 were inclined to allow the male experimenters to enter ahead of them in line 6.6% more often than any other group. Because all experimenters were approximately the same age as this group, possibly there was a type of identification with the experimenter. The young group tries to appear, and perhaps is, more free and non-materialistic; thus allowing the young male experimenter to go before them.

If this experiment were to be performed in some other geographical area, it is likely that the results would vary to some degree. Also, the race of the subjects and experimenters is not representative of the society as a whole.

This nonreactive study was done during the Christmas rush which causes long lines, hurried people, and short tempers. Perhaps also new research should be done with experimenters over 45.

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE OF S's COMPLYING ACCORDING TO THEIR AGE AND SEX (DISREGARDING SEX OF E's)

		S's	
		Male	Female
S's	Younger	93.3%	90.0%
	Older	96.7%	76.7%

TABLE II

SEX OF S's COMPLYING IN RELATION TO SEX OF E's REQUESTING A FAVOR (IN %)

		S's	
		Male	Female
E's	Male	93.3%	90.0%
	Female	96.7%	76.7%

TABLE III

AGE OF S's COMPLYING IN RELATION TO

SEX OF E's (IN %)

		S's	
		Younger	Older
E's	Male	93.3%	86.7%
	Female	86.7%	86.7%

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